

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky with his Slovak counterpart, Jaroslav Nad, in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Head of PM's Office attends festive general assembly meeting of Transcarpathia Reformed Church parish in Berehove

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: HUNGARY'S SECURITY COMES FIRST

Hungary's security comes first, so Hungary "is not at war with anyone", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview on Friday.

Orbán told public radio that the outbreak of the war in Ukraine had coincided with the general election campaign in Hungary, and the Hungarian leadership had made clear that "this is not our war", while the left-wing opposition signalled their intention to comply with "what the international community says". If they were in power, "we would be as mired in this war as the Germans are", the prime minister said.

"It is in Hungary's interest to stay out of the war," Orbán said, adding that Hungarians had "chosen peace". The government will continue to work to keep the country from being dragged into the war, in line with "the will of the people", he said. Hungarian leftist politicians "funded by the West", Orbán said, represented powers that "are using every means at their disposal to push Hungary into the war". The ruling parties have made it clear that their priority is the country's security. "We want a ceasefire and peace talks," he said.

ORBÁN: NATL CONSULTATION 'TOOL OF VIBRANT DEMOCRACY'

In an interview with public radio, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán praised the government's National Consultation surveys as a "Hungarian specialty", designed as a "tool of vibrant democracy" after the 2010 crisis when "maintaining national unity, or at least majority, was key." The last round of surveys have clearly shown that Hungarians reject European Union sanctions against Russia "because they understand the damage they cause", he said.

Hungarians believe sanctions failed to help Ukraine and "bring Russia to its knees", but inflicted "enormous damage on" the EU and Hungary, Orbán said. This year, Hungary will lose 3,764 billion forints (EUR 9.7bn) in lost growth, he said.

Meanwhile, the EU is planning a new sanctions package expanding the restrictions to the nuclear industry, he warned. The prime minister said his "success at the negotiating table" depended on showing that Hungarians were united against sanctions. "The successful National Consultation is of great help and possibly the most important factor in ensuring success," he said. Although the EU has criticised the number of participants in the survey, "their opinion is neither here nor there", Orbán said. "They will have

to face the prime minister at the negotiating table, and the more forceful the people have expressed their opinions, the harder that will be."

While Hungarians want to make their voice heard in the EU, the voice of those opposing the war in western Europe is being oppressed, he said. "Western European countries are trying to get through this time of war with the least possible disturbance from the voice of the people," he said. The prime minister said that more than 90% of Western media was "globalist and liberal", while Hungarian readers had access to liberal and globalist views of the war as well as to the patriotic, conservative view.

Regarding the issue of opposition campaign financing, Orbán said the lesson to be learnt was that in addition to the existence of a "dollar left" in Hungary, there exists a "dollar media". Positions represented by the left wing in the most important issues, such as migration, gender and the war, were "harmful to Hungary". "The reason why they do this has only become clear now: because they get paid for it," Orbán said. "They represent these positions because they get paid for that," he added. At the same time, right-wing parties "must not abandon hope and continue to strive for full national unity on important issues," he said.

Orbán said it was hopeful that the source of the money would be

revealed. "The technique for bringing in resources is already known: they came through a network linked to [US financier] George Soros," he said. "Once the facts are revealed, it will be necessary to create legal regulations for a system of defence against politicians that can be bought with money," he added.

ORBÁN: GOVT TO REJECT SANCTIONS BOOSTING INFLATION

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in an interview with public radio, said the government would not support any sanctions that further increase inflation. The most important issue is energy and the sanctions against Russia must not affect nuclear energy, he said. In the past, Hungary has already achieved getting an exemption concerning oil imports, he added. Despite the government giving back 13th month pensions, significantly increasing the minimum wage and refunding one year's tax to families, "for the people, everyday reality is the reality in the shop", Orbán said. The government is fighting inflation, "a vaccine has been administered", and it is already working in the economy, he said. Inflation could start decreasing from February or March and drop to single digit by the end of the year, he added. The government and the central bank are coordinating their moves in order to achieve this, Orbán said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARIAN PEOPLE PAYING HIGH PRICE FOR UKRAINE WAR

Hungary and the Hungarian people are already paying a high price for the war in Ukraine, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said at an open debate in the UN Security Council in New York on Thursday, adding that “the great powers” should focus on peacemaking instead of taking steps that risked escalating the conflict. The ministry said that Szijjártó had expressed thanks to the body’s Japanese presidency for convening the meeting, adding that the debate was “timely” and “singular” as international political discourse was still “ruled by war rhetoric”.

“War rhetoric is very loud while the peace rhetoric can hardly be heard,” he said. As a neighbour of Ukraine, Hungary directly feels the severe negative effects of the armed conflict, so the government is interested in peace, he said. More than one million refugees have left Ukraine through Hungary, which is carrying out the largest humanitarian scheme in its history, he said. The annual cost of Hungary’s energy imports have grown from 7 billion euros to 17 billion euros and inflation is sky-high, he added.

In addition to Ukrainians, a large number of ethnic Hungarians from Transcarpathia have died in the war, he said. Hungary has already paid a high price for the war, despite the fact that the Hungarian people never wanted a war and are not responsible

for it, he added. “Hungarians made it very clear at last year’s parliamentary election that this is not our war...” he said. Commenting on the tragic consequences of the war, he said thousands of people had died and millions had been forced to leave their homes, while the sanctions posed an enormous challenge to European economies.

“Perhaps all this looks different from many hundred or thousand kilometres away, or from the other side of the ocean, but believe me, we who live next door see the situation as a very serious one,” he said. “Please take this message from a next door neighbour: this war must end without delay because we are in the 25th hour and we must focus on peace,” he added. He called on the international community to “replace war rhetoric” with statements of peace, adding that great powers should avoid measures or even remarks that carried the risk of prolonging and escalating the war. Instead of intensifying arms supplies, he called for efforts to focus on establishing a ceasefire and the immediate start of peace talks.

SZIJJÁRTÓ MEETS HEAD OF TURKIC INVESTMENT FUND

The Turkic Investment Fund offers great opportunities for Hungary to strengthen economic and trade cooperation with Turkic states and may generate new investments, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said

in Budapest on Friday. Péter Szijjártó told a joint press conference with the fund’s head, Baghdad Amrayev, that central Asia’s role has grown recently, partly due to the European energy crisis. The region is rich in energy resources and harbours serious growth potential, he said. Trade volume with members of the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) has grown 2.5-fold to 4.5 billion US dollars over the past decade, he said.

Hungary’s crisis management model focuses on boosting support for investments “whenever world economy is ailing or heading in the wrong direction”, Szijjártó said. “Investments in such situations are not only key to overcoming difficulties but also a strength when it comes to intensifying competition as the economy re-ignites,” he said. In 2022, the “black year of the world economy”, Hungary broke records in investment, exports and employment, he said.

Szijjártó noted that Hungary has opened embassies in all Turkic states, and Uzbekistan has announced it will do the same in Budapest. Budapest is also host to the OTS European representation and its institute for drought prevention, with opportunities arising for the export of Hungarian technologies. Szijjártó also decorated Amreyev with the Hungarian Order of Merit, Middle Cross, for his work as the Secretary-General of the OTS.

Viktor Orbán also met Amreyev for talks in his office. The investment fund will be the most important joint

financial institution of the Organization of Turkic States, which aims at mobilising the economic potentials of its members, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan, as well as Hungary and Turkmenistan as observer states, and to strengthen their trade and economic cooperation, Bertalan Havasi, the PM's press chief, cited Orbán as saying. The Turkic Joint Investment Fund was launched with capital of 350 million US dollars, primarily with the aim of supporting projects by small and medium-sized businesses, he added. The meeting was attended by Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: 'UNACCEPTABLE' GERMAN MINISTERS 'BLOCKING' PAKS EXPANSION

Hungary's foreign minister has blasted German Green Party ministers, accusing them of "blocking" the Paks nuclear power plant expansion "for ideological and political reasons". Péter Szijjártó said the move was unfounded in European law, and there was no ban on nuclear cooperation with Russia, according to a ministry statement on Friday. At a press conference, Szijjártó said the European Commission had not vetoed the Paks nuclear power plant expansion, adding that German Green Party ministers were obstructing the project. Russia's Rosatom has a contract with a German-French consortium to build the plant's control

system, he noted. Whereas France's export authority has already granted the relevant permissions, the German government is blocking these for now, he added.

Decisions concerning the energy mix fall under national competences, and energy security is a national matter, the minister said, adding that nuclear cooperation was not subject to sanctions. Amid the current turmoil, countries that can produce a major portion of their energy needs can be regarded as secure, and in Hungary's case nuclear energy guarantees such a scenario, Szijjártó said. Any obstacles to Hungarian-Russian nuclear cooperation are "deeply contrary to national interests", he said, adding that Hungary would not vote for any measures that would undermine that cooperation.

OFFICIAL: HUNGARY, ROMANIA ACT TOGETHER AGAINST UKRAINE'S 'DISCRIMINATIVE' MINORITY PROTECTION LAW

Acting on a joint Hungarian-Romanian initiative, the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has unanimously decided to ask the CoE advisory body Venice Commission to assess if Ukraine's minority protection law accords with international standards, the head of parliament's foreign affairs committee said on Thursday.

Zsolt Németh told MTI that Ukraine had failed to coordinate with the Venice Commission or representatives of national minorities despite being obliged to do so, and the representatives have expressed their dissatisfaction with the new law. Németh, a ruling Fidesz lawmaker, said that the Venice Commission was expected to handle the issue as a priority and may publish its assessment within months. It is also in Ukraine's interest that its minority protection law should fall in line with international norms, he added.

"A basic condition of Ukraine's European Union integration is compliance with international minority protection regulations, and the Copenhagen criteria required for accession also stipulate this," he said. Németh also said that the Hungarian delegation had notable successes at the CoE parliamentary assembly, citing its legal committee's unanimous approval of a Hungarian report on the fulfilment of Hungary-related rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. Hungary's performance has improved outstandingly in comparison with that of other countries, he added.

SZÁZADVÉG: EUROPEANS 'STRONGLY DIVIDED' ABOUT SUPPLYING WEAPONS TO UKRAINE

Public support for supplying weapons to Ukraine is above 50% in only nine of the European Union's

27 member states, with several countries supporting Ukraine with weapons despite their citizens' disagreement, the Századvég Foundation said on Friday. The think-tank's latest survey dubbed Europe Project also shows that in 13 EU countries the proportion of people against sending weapons to Ukraine is higher than the proportion of supporters. Some 80% of Hungarians, 69% of Greeks, 62% of Austrians and 57% of Czechs said they opposed the EU supporting Ukraine with arms, Századvég said.

Despite 57% of Czechs being against EU arms purchases for Kiev, the Czech government has been sending substantial shipments of weapons to Ukraine, the think-tank said. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz decided in late January that Berlin would supply 14 tanks to Ukraine despite the fact that 49% of Germans were against sending arms to Ukraine and only 44% supported it, Századvég said. In five EU member states including Spain, Luxembourg, Romania, France and Ireland the proportion of people supporting arms supplies to Ukraine was below 50% of respondents.

MEDIA AUTHORITY: STREAMING CONTENT MUST HAVE AGE RATINGS

Content of streaming providers must carry age ratings like those of terrestrial television programmes, Hungary's media authority said on Thursday.

Reflecting a fresh amendment to Hungary's media law, starting this year age ratings must be shown at the start of the programme or in the programme schedule for on-demand media services, the Media Council of the National Media and Communications Authority (NMHH) said in a statement, adding that the move was justified by the need to protect children across a range of platforms. Also, new technical solutions are needed to block children from accessing violent and pornographic content, the statement said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ SLAMS UEFA ORG FOR REJECTING FLAGS OF HISTORIC HUNGARY

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Friday slammed the anti-discrimination organisation of the European Football Association (UEFA FARE) for its report on the use of flags depicting historic Hungary at a match between Hungary and Italy in September. Responding to a question at a press conference on a different matter, Szijjártó said the organisation which proposed banning the image had "no idea of Hungarian history". FARE "is basically a volunteer workers' militia living for reporting others on inane issues," Szijjarto said, adding that he hoped the UEFA leadership would "free European football from this militia because they are trouble, and they will continue to cause trouble."

KARÁCSONY: GOVT 'UNJUST'

Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest, on Friday complained about how the central government treated the capital. "Where is the equality?" he wrote on Facebook, adding that the government's relations with the city were "unjust and unsustainable". The mayor said Budapest had transferred 6.348 billion forints to the central government in the month of January, 348 million more than the amount of support the government promised to contribute towards renovating Chain Bridge. The central government obliges local governments to make contributions through tax deductions on wages and "solidarity contributions", he said. "Not only do we not get a single cent from the government, but we must also pay 6.348 billion" forints to the central coffers, Karácsony added.

JOBLESS RATE 3.9% IN DEC

Hungary's jobless rate was 3.9% in December, up from 3.8% in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. The rate covers unemployment among people between the ages of 15 and 74.

In absolute terms, there were 189,600 unemployed, 3,100 more than a month earlier and 10,700 more than at the end of 2021. The employment rate in Hungary in December was 74.4%, 1.3 percentage points higher than a

year ago, the KSH said. The number of employed aged 15-74 in December came to 4,704,000, up 17,000 from the previous year. In the full year of 2022, the number of employed increased by 61,000 to 4.696 million.

Commenting on the data, the economy development ministry said the jobless rate had been improving for 7 consecutive months, with the number of jobholders hitting a "record" in December. Youth unemployment fell especially steeply, from 13.5% to 10.6%, they said. Labour market tendencies have vindicated government measures targeted to preserve full employment and to protect families, the statement said. Crisis resistance and competitiveness will have to be boosted further in 2023 to avoid a recession and preserve full employment, the ministry said. The government is launching a 700 billion forint credit line to fund companies amid "impossibly" high interest rates, the statement added.

DEATHS OUTPACE BIRTHS IN DEC - KSH

Preliminary data show that 7,366 children were born and 11,940 people died in December 2022, with the number of live births decreasing by

5.0% and deaths by 13% in January 2022-December 2022 compared with the same period a year earlier, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. The natural population loss was 4,574 in December this year as against 9,150 in December 2021, KSH said. In December 2022, 2,798 couples tied the knot, down 36% from November 2021. In the past 12 months, 88,400 children were born, down 5.0% from the same period of last year, while 135,700 people died, 13% fewer than in the previous year. The natural population loss came to 47,206 compared with 62,582 in the same period of last year, a drop of 24%. Between January 2022 and December 2022, 64,100 couples were married, 11% fewer than in the previous year.

SOME 10,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON THURSDAY

Fully 5,039 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Thursday, while 4,957 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 185 people, ORFK said on Friday. Budapest received 89 people, 24 children among them, by train.

HUNGARIAN LAWYER AWAITING EXTRADITION, ACCUSED OF SUPPORTING ITALIAN MAFIA

The Metropolitan Court ordered on Thursday the temporary extradition custody of a Hungarian female lawyer for allegedly supporting the Italian mafia. The woman and her accomplices are thought to have formed a criminal group that operated in Italy and other countries, the court said in a statement. The lawyer used her status to formally head Hungarian companies registered at the address of her Budapest law firm while the head of the criminal group was fully controlling the companies, using them for illegal transfer of assets and money laundering, the statement added.

The court of Catanzaro in Italy has issued a European arrest warrant against the lawyer in connection with nine criminal acts carrying a possible prison term of twenty years. The woman has objected to being extradited, and she can only be transferred if the Italian authorities offer a sufficient legal guarantee by March 7, 2023 that, at her request, she will be transferred back to Hungary if she is sentenced to prison.